

BRANCHING OUT

Creating Connections to End Sexual Violence

Summer/Fall 2009

Volume 3, Issue 2

Changes & Transitions at Sexual Assault Services

By Katy Adler



Sexual Assault Services is excited to announce that we have received funding for a new position and to increase an existing position. For the new position, we were awarded funds from the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) for a part-time Hispanic Outreach Advocate. This is a position that SAS has wanted to create for quite some time, to meet the needs of the Hispanic and Latina/Latino community in Racine. This position will add a bilingual staff member to the program, and will provide much-needed specialized services to Spanish speaking survivors in Racine County. The Hispanic Outreach Advocate will also be doing outreach in the community, making sure that Hispanic and Latino/Latina survivors are aware of the services available and know how to access them. This grant will start in October, so we hope to fill this position

in the coming months.

We have also received funding from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Recovery Act Funds to increase the Family Advocate position at the Racine County Child Advocacy Center (CAC) by 20 hours/week. If you are not familiar with the CAC, it is a center where children are interviewed regarding suspicion of child abuse. The interview is recorded, and the goal is to reduce the number of times that the child has to repeat disclosures of abuse. The Family Advocate provides support and information on resources to families while their children are being interviewed. We are pleased that Samantha Sustachek, the current Volunteer and Community Education Coordinator, has accepted the position of Family Advocate.

In the coming months, Sexual Assault Services will be going through a number of other changes. First, Terri DeWalt has completed her doctoral internship and will be returning to SAS in October. We will be glad to have her back in Racine, and of course, back in the program. Also in October, Lana DeVinny will be retiring as the Program Manager. Terri will be taking over many of Lana's responsibilities as the Program Manager, and then there will be a new staff member who will take over Lana's remaining responsibilities. We will all miss Lana, but we are happy that she will be able to enjoy retirement. Finally, I will also be leaving as the SAS Program Coordinator when Terri returns. It has been wonderful getting to know the community and the program over the past year, and I want to thank everyone for all of your support throughout these times of transition.

— Katy

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Face To Face

By Lora Schultz Reinders

In addition to our counseling services, providing legal advocacy is another way Sexual Assault Services offers "face to face" services. It is important for those of us who are part of the "system" to understand that the criminal justice process can be traumatic to victims, just as experiencing the assault was. At SAS we attempt to address this difficulty by providing individual service to our victims going through the investigation and court process, as well as working with other members of the process through the Racine County Sexual Assault Response Team.

In providing individual services to clients, we are aware that it is very difficult for anyone to navigate through the court system. Victims often encounter this confusing and intimidating system while they are already highly vulnerable due to their victimization. As legal advocates we are able to help ease anxiety by providing information about what to expect. Although each case is different and progresses differently through the investigation and court process, we are able to provide information as to what is possible, and what is probable. As advocates, it is also important to normalize victims' feelings regarding the process. Victims often feel frustrated with delays in the process, or with decisions that are out of their control. To address these feelings we can be a supportive ear, as well as a go-between, to talk to assistant district attorneys, or other professionals and explain how the victim is feeling, or what they would like to have happen.

Often a very difficult aspect of the court process is the victim having to face his or her perpetrator in court. It is important to have the presence of support people in the courtroom when a victim has to testify at a preliminary hearing or jury trial. SAS staff are available to attend court hearings with victims, or their family members. Knowing there are individuals backing a victim in the courtroom can be helpful in getting through this anxiety-provoking situation.

Sexual Assault Services works hard to support victims/survivors throughout their entire healing process. It is important to remember the difficulties a victim experiences do not end when his or her assault ends. This is often just the beginning. The investigation process, court process, and personal healing process of the victim are all important aspects to be addressed by all of us whose jobs touch the lives of sexual assault survivors.

— Lora

SAS First & Second Quarter Statistics January—June 2009

Crisis Line Calls.....	113
Racine Hospital Visits.....	41
Burlington Hospital Visits.....	3
Legal Advocacy Sessions.....	37
New Counseling Clients.....	51
Counseling Sessions.....	285
Community Presentations.....	66
CAC Appointments.....	51

*Are you a caregiver of a child
who has been sexually abused?
Are you looking for support and healing?*

We may have what you are looking for.

**Sexual Assault Services of Lutheran Social Services
is currently offering a support group for non-
offending caregivers of children who have been
sexually abused.**

The support group is a place where you can...

- Explore how the abuse has affected your child and your family.
- Learn about how to help your child and family heal.
- Reduce feelings of isolation and aloneness.
- Have your feelings and experiences acknowledged and accepted.
- Receive support from other caregivers and provide support to them.

**Please call Sexual Assault Services at 262-619-1634
to register for the group. All group members will
need to meet with one of the facilitators before
beginning the group for
an orientation session.**



**The group is confidential
and provided at no cost.
It is held the first and third
Thursdays of the month
from 6:30 to 7:30 at the
Racine County Child Ad-
vocacy Center.**



Legislative Update

By Vicki Biehn

On March 24, 2009, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV) held a joint lobby day. This was a day that was set-aside for citizens that are concerned about sexual and domestic violence to talk with their representatives about these issues. I attended the lobby day and talked with my representatives about a variety of issues that WCASA and WCADV plan to work on in the 2009/2010 legislative session. The following are a few of the issues that WCASA and WCADV plan to work on in the upcoming legislative session.

One of the issues that I discussed with my representatives is the need for the state of Wisconsin to protect victim privacy. Victims of sexual assault and domestic violence often experience fear and trauma. Intrusions into their privacy exacerbate this fear and loss of control in their lives. Right now, Wisconsin has online open-records laws and although this is well intended, this can expose survivors to unnecessary risk of further violence, harassment or stalking from their perpetrators. One such concern is the open records of the homeowner's name and address information on tax assessor's websites. Representative Joe Parisi will be introducing a bill in late July or early August that will prevent taxation districts from allowing the general public to search for property taxes by name. Tony Gibart, the policy specialist from WCADV also expects that sometime in the next session there will be a general privacy bill that will address law enforcement records, civil court rape shield laws and testimony.

Another issue that I spoke with my representatives about is anti-discrimination laws related to rental housing for victims of sexual and domestic violence. In last year's legislative session the legislature passed the Safe Housing Act which insured that victims of sexual and domestic violence could not be penalized for using emergency services and assisted them in terminating their leases if their safety was in jeopardy. Unfortunately, some landlords are now discriminating against survivors by not renting to them. Senator Lehman, who represents Racine County, will introduce a bill in the upcoming legislative session that specifically lists that renters and sellers cannot discriminate against survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. The bill is called the Victim Fair Housing Act and is Senate Bill 204 and Assembly Bill 277.

Another important issue that WCASA and WCADV are working on is supporting mental health parity in Wisconsin. This means that if someone has medical coverage, the insurer will cover mental health the same as physical health. Currently, Wisconsin law only requires that insurance companies cover a minimum of up to \$7,000 per year of a patient's medical bills related to mental health care. This minimum requirement has become the maximum payment provided under many insurance plans. This amount of coverage is inadequate for many survivors, and therefore, if they need further mental health services they have to pay out of pocket, receive publicly funded services, or go without treatment. Wisconsin is one of only nine states that do not have legislation providing mental health parity.

If you wish to become more informed and involved with the legislative agenda from WCASA and WCADV please contact Tony Gibart at tonyg@wcadv.org and ask to be added to the action alert list. When you are added to this list, you will receive e-mails that alert you when action is needed on your part. Usually, you will be asked to call or e-mail your representative and ask them to support or not support a certain bill. The action that you are asked to do usually only takes a couple of minutes. I always feel empowered and energized when I take these actions.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to give me a call at 262-763-6226 ext 31 or email vbiehn@lsswis.org.

— Vicki

Call For Submissions...



If you are a survivor or you know a survivor who would like to submit a poem, short story, artwork or editorial for publication in this newsletter, please email it to Samantha Sustachek (ssustachek@lsswis.org).



SAS Wish List

- Volunteer Advocates!
- Gift cards/certificates from Target, Office Depot, grocery stores or other discount stores
- Courage to Heal book series
- New clothes for victims at the hospital (t-shirts, sweat pants, underwear, etc.)
- Gift bags filled with body lotions & shower gels to be given to victims at the hospital
- Candy for counseling clients
- Bottled water or a water cooler to be used for counseling clients and during volunteer trainings



Helping Hands

By Samantha Sustachek

Every July, Sexual Assault Services (SAS) hosts a Recognition Dinner in honor of our many wonderful Volunteer Advocates. This year's event (our 9th annual) was held on Wednesday evening, July 29th. We had a fantastic turnout for the event, and everyone seemed to have a great time!

This yearly dinner is all about recognizing SAS Volunteer Advocates for their dedication and hard work year round. With the help of volunteers, SAS is able to provide 24-hour coverage for our crisis line and hospital response team. Because of this extraordinary group of people, sexual assault survivors are never more than a phone call away from a compassionate ear for their problems or an answer to their questions – even when those questions come at 3:00 in the morning. In the first half of 2009, SAS volunteers answered 113 calls on the crisis line. Because of Volunteer Advocates, a sexual assault survivor will never have to go through a forensic exam at the hospital alone. Through June of 2009, Volunteer Advocates have responded 44 times to Wheaton Franciscan All Saints in Racine and Aurora Memorial Hospital of Burlington. Because of the small size of the SAS staff, without volunteers, these efforts would not be possible.

So as a small token of our appreciation, every summer SAS staff members make dinner for our volunteers (this year's dinner was an Italian smorgasbord). Attendees of the dinner are also recognized during an awards ceremony with a small gift and a certificate denoting their years of service. We were able to honor fifteen Volunteer Advocates this year (a few less than half of our active volunteers). Sherry Hamermiller, Nicole Schiro, Christina Dudzinski, and Sarah Wright, our brand new Advocates from our March and June trainings, received certificates of completion of the training program. Jennifer Short and Corinne Dombeck were honored for two years of service. Claire Eckert and Jesse Williams have completed three years of service to SAS. Jan Exner and Adell Echeverria received certificates for five years of service, and Reggie Poepping and Chris Benko took home certificates for six years. Barb Rigden was honored for seven years as a SAS Advocate and Cookie Walek for eight years. And again this year, our SAS veteran who has been with the volunteer program since the year it began was honored with nine years of service. Congratulations to Sandy DeWalt for that accomplishment!

As wonderful as the turnout was for this year's Recognition Dinner, next year SAS would love to have even more volunteers to honor. We regularly train new individuals to add to our team, and our next training is scheduled for October. If you think you or someone you know would make a good Advocate, we encourage you to contact us for more information. If you are a compassionate, non-judgmental, good listener with a desire to help survivors, we would love to have you join us for our next training session.

For more information about the volunteer program or to sign up for the next training, please contact Samantha Sustachek at 262-619-1634, Ext. 14 or send an email to ssustachek@lsswis.org. You couldn't be joining a nicer group of people!

— Sam

Meet Reggie!

Sexual Assault Services employs a part time Crisis Response Worker to help out with filling on call time, especially in Western Racine County. This position had been open for several months, so we are pleased to announce that one of our own Volunteer Advocates recently stepped into the position. We wanted her to introduce herself!



Hello. I am Reggie Poepping, and I have been with Sexual Assault Services of Lutheran Social Services since July of 2003 as a Volunteer Advocate. Since May of this year, I am the staff Crisis Response Worker for Aurora Memorial Hospital of Burlington, and on occasion, Wheaton Franciscan All Saints Racine. In this position, I am on call four days a month to help with coverage in Western Racine County. Like the volunteers, when called in I respond to the hospital to aid the victim with information, resources and follow-up services available to them. Most important though, to the victim and sometimes her/his family, is our concern and mere presence there with them at this difficult time, which is usually much appreciated. I have found over the years, the SAS of LSS staff and volunteers are some of the most genuine, caring people to be involved with in this program.

In my spare time, I enjoy spending time with my husband and three adult children, as well as my extended family and friends. We are all very close and enjoy each other's company. We even vacation together! We are expecting our first grandchild anytime now. We are very excited. This will keep us young!

I thank SAS of LSS for this opportunity to be able to make a difference in someone's life.

Coming Soon At SAS!



Volunteer Training

Would you like to join the SAS team of Volunteer Advocates? Do you know of someone who would make a great volunteer? If so, we have an opportunity coming up very soon! SAS is currently recruiting community members for our next training. Sessions will be held evenings in October and will total approximately 15 hours overall. For more information or to sign up for

the training, please contact Samantha Sustachek at 262-619-1634 or ssustachek@lsswis.org.



NEW GROUP FOR TEEN SURVIVORS

Sexual Assault Services will be offering a therapy group for teenage girls who have been sexually abused or assaulted. The group is scheduled to begin in late September or October.

Groups can be especially helpful for teens because teens often look to their peers for support, and being with others their age helps to normalize their feelings and experience. The group will consist of a variety of activities including talking, games, art activities and more.

If you know of any 12-15 year old girls who have experienced sexual assault or abuse and may benefit from a support group, please refer them to our office at (262) 619-1634 to schedule an orientation session.



Training Opportunity...

The therapists here at SAS were fortunate to receive a training from Karen Carnabucci on June 2nd. Karen donated her time and provided information on experiential therapy and how it can be utilized to help sexual abuse and sexual assault survivors heal. Karen has a psychotherapy, consulting and teaching practice in Racine at the Lake House Health and Learning Center, www.lakehousecenter.com, and can be reached at karenc@wi.rr.com.

Karen provides trainings for groups or organizations, and also offers an email newsletter (to which you can subscribe at the Lake House website).

Thank you, Karen!



Community Leaders to Sign SART Guiding Principles & Procedures

The Racine County Sexual Response Team (SART) has spent the last two years working on a document entitled "Racine County SART Guiding Principles and Procedures." This document is intended to provide direction to agencies and individuals who provide services to victims of sexual assault and will help insure the quality and integrity of the fact-finding process used in cases of sexual assault.

Now that the document is complete, an official signing ceremony will take place. Leaders within the different agencies represented in the Principles and Procedures will gather on Thursday, October 8th at 1:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the Ives Grove Public Works Building in Sturtevant. A presentation will be held, during which these community leaders will "sign on" to the Principles and Procedures. A small reception with refreshments will follow.

The Racine County SART is very proud of this accomplishment and pleased that so many community members want to improve our response to sexual assault victims. Feel free to contact SART co-chair Vicki Biehn at 262-619-1634 Ext. 15 with any questions.





Sexual Assault Services
1220 Mound Ave., Suite 304
Racine, WI 53404

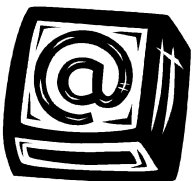
Contact Us!

SAS Racine Office
1220 Mound Ave. Suite 304
Racine, WI 53404
262-619-1634

SAS Burlington Office
480 S. Pine St.
Burlington, WI 53105
262-763-6226 Ext. 31

24 Hour Crisis Line: 262-637-SAFE (7233)

Stay Connected!



Join our News and Events email update list! Would you like to receive information on upcoming SAS events and volunteer opportunities? Email Samantha Sustachek at ssustachek@lsswis.org with "SAS news and events" in the subject line and she will include you in all SAS news and events related emails.

Sexual Assault Services seeks to create a safe and compassionate environment to help promote the healing of sexual assault survivors and their support people.